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UNCLAS YEREVAN 000722

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR INR/R/MR-STHIBEAULT, EUR/PPD-MLOGSDON AND  
SRUEDY, EUR/CACEN-ESIDEREAS, EUR, EUR/ACE, EUR/SNEC,  
EUR/SE

E.O. 12958; N/A

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SUBJECT: REACTION FROM YEREVAN, ARMENIA: SHEIKH AHMED  
YASSIN'S ASSASSINATION

1. SUMMARY: The assassination of the founder and spiritual leader of the Palestinian Hamas movement, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, was reported on all Armenian TV channels, the reports being mainly factual. However, some local papers published commentaries. The following is the summary of the articles. END SUMMARY

MIDDLE EAST ON THE VERGE OF A NEW WAR?

2. Government official Armenian language daily HAYASTANI HANRAPETUTIUN (03/24) draws parallels between the reaction of Washington and Moscow. "Ahmed Yassin's assassination showed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is entering a new and uncompromising phase, where the situation can shift from separate terrorist acts to a large-scale war. An interesting observation: while Washington's calm reaction (to put it mildly) to Sheikh Ahmed Yassin's assassination was understandable, Moscow was also strangely restrained in its statement."

THE AMERICAN BALANCE

3. Oppositionist Armenian daily HAYKAKAN ZHAMANAK (03/24) also focused on the reaction of the Bush Administration to the assassination. "The main initiator of the Middle East peace process, the United States has still not condemned the assassination of the spiritual leader of the extremist Palestinian organization HAMAS, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin. The White House is trying to maintain a balance, which angers the Arabs. Observers note that the Bush administration would have adopted a clearer position had it not been for the November 2 presidential elections. Unlike the United States, almost all European countries, including Great Britain, have condemned the HAMAS spiritual leader's assassination."

SHEIKH'S LESSONS

4. Oppositionist Armenian daily ARAVOT (03/24) stresses the attitude of the world toward this killing. "The fact of the assassination of the founder and spiritual leader of the Palestinian Hamas movement, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, by the Israeli air force had a litmus paper effect by simply showing how far the world, or at least its civilized part, is from the realization of the importance of strengthening the universal principles and standards of political culture. In addition to the Arab world, a number of European countries joined the ranks of those who condemned the actions aimed at neutralizing Yassin. It is interesting that they included that dedicated member of the international counter-terrorism movement, Great Britain. However, when we 'translate' what has happened into a simple and understandable language, we get the following story. There is a rather large group of Palestinian killers, who have been consistently stripped of their intelligence ever since their childhood and have become like zombies, who couldn't care less about their own lives, and who regularly carry out bloody terrorist acts against peaceful Israeli citizens. However, for some reason, the world voices its 'justified' protests when the main organizer and the 'brain center' of the suicide terrorists is killed, even though it seems that this should not have been the case. The arguments are extremely ironic. 'A dangerous new wave of violence is going to start now,' threatens a scared Europe, implying that the old wave of violence was less dangerous in the days of Yassin, who did nothing but organize terrorist acts all the time. 'The United States, who has always been against extra-judicial killings, does not want to condemn Yassin's assassination,' Russia says in bewilderment, while Russian media runs headlines about the Russian Special Forces killing some more or less important Chechen rebels for weeks on end. It is quite appropriate here to remember one of Putin's famous statements: 'There should be no mercy towards terrorists; if necessary, we'll destroy them in a bathroom.'"

WALKER